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Title Slide: Introduction to NCES Postsecondary Education

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This module provides users with an overview of the NCES postsecondary education sample survey datasets.

Specifically, we focus on a family of studies based upon the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, or NPSAS. NPSAS is a cross-sectional study designed to generate a nationally representative portrait of how students and their families pay for postsecondary education. Importantly, NPSAS also provides baseline data for the two postsecondary longitudinal studies – the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, or BPS, and the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, or B&B.

BPS and B&B follow the experiences of cohorts of undergraduates as they progress through their postsecondary education and complete—or fail to complete—a degree, and transition to the workforce or additional education and training.

This module will introduce the NPSAS, BPS, and B&B target populations; sample and study designs; data collection years, sources, and collection methods; and then highlight the topics for which data are available for analysis in the NPSAS, BPS, and B&B. You can click on one of the survey titles above, which will take you directly to detailed information about the postsecondary education sample survey of your choice. Or you can click the 'next' button to advance to the next slide within the module. At the end of each sample survey section of the module, you will be provided with a button that will return you to this objectives slide, from which you may either select another postsecondary education sample survey detailed within the training module. There will also be a button that allows you to exit the module completely.

This module also provides a broad overview of the topics for which data are available for analysis to help you answer the fundamental question of... “Are these postsecondary education data for me?” The subsequent postsecondary education data training modules contained within this system will discuss some of these topics in greater detail and address questions about how to effectively use the dataset for your analytic purposes.

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A summary of the overall timeline for these three postsecondary education data collections is shown here. As you can see, the first NPSAS was conducted in the 1986–87 academic year (NPSAS:87). Other administrations have been conducted triennially from 1986-87 through 1995-96; and quadrennially beginning in 1999-2000.

During alternating years, baseline data are collected from NPSAS that serve as the foundation of the two postsecondary longitudinal studies – BPS and B&B.

## **Introduction to NCES Postsecondary Education**

You can click on one of the survey titles above, which will take you directly to detailed information about the postsecondary education sample survey dataset of your choice. Or you can click the 'next' button to advance to the next slide within the module. At the end of each section of the module, you will be provided a return to list button that will return you to this objectives slide, from which you may either select another postsecondary education sample survey dataset detailed within the training module. There will also be a button that allows you to exit the module completely.

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The National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) is a nationally-representative study conducted periodically by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to determine how students and their families pay for postsecondary education. Importantly, the study includes both undergraduate and graduate students, and both aided and unaided students, enrolled at all types of institutions across the United States.

Mandated by law, NPSAS is designed to address a wide range of policy questions related to postsecondary education broadly and Federal Student Aid programs, originally authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act, in particular.

Congressional staff; leaders within the U.S. Department of Education, and analysts at the Government Accountability Office (or GAO), the Office of Management and Budget (or OMB), and national Higher Education Associations, use NPSAS data to better understand well-known programs like the Pell Grant and Direct Loans. Not surprisingly, a wide range of other researchers and graduate students also use NPSAS data in their own work.

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NPSAS is based on a nationally representative sample of students enrolled in postsecondary education institutions in the United States during a given federal financial aid award year.

Sampled institutions represent all major sectors of postsecondary education, including public, private not-for-profit, and private for-profit; and less-than-2-year schools, 2-year colleges, 4-year colleges, and major universities with graduate-level programs. All must have a signed Title IV Program Participation Agreement with the U.S. Department of Education, thus making those institutions eligible to participate in federal student aid programs.

Student study members include both undergraduate and graduate students who receive financial aid, as well as those who do not. As many as 130,000 students may participate in a study cycle.

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The NPSAS sampling design involves the selection of a nationally representative sample of postsecondary education institutions by institution type, followed by the sampling of students within these institutions by student type (for example, First-time beginner, other undergraduate student, or graduate student).

As will be discussed in later slides, both institutional and student sampling designs change slightly to reflect contemporary research issues and the needs of the longitudinal study being fielded in a given NPSAS cycle. In NPSAS:2008, which served as the base for a new iteration of Baccalaureate and Beyond, approximately 1,960 institutions and 137,800 students were initially selected for participation.

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NPSAS collects data on students from several sources, including: student interviews, student records at the institution attended, Federal Student Aid's FAFSA Central Processing System (CPS), the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS), the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), ACT and SAT files, and the IPEDS Institutional Characteristics (IC) file.

Institutional Student Record Collection includes data such as class level, major field of study, attendance status, tuition and fees, admission test scores, financial aid awards, cost of attendance and student budget information, grade point average, demographic characteristics, and enrollment history.

Web-based student interviews (completed as a telephone interview or by self-administration) provide data known primarily by students, including private loans, other outside sources of financial support, academic expectations, and employment and income data.

U.S. Department of Education Administrative Records, including information collected via the FAFSA and stored in the U.S. Department of Education's FAFSA Central Processing System (CPS) and National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS). This includes the types and amounts of federal financial aid received, cumulative Pell Grant and Stafford loan amounts, and loan repayment status.

Other administrative databases outside the government may be used to supplement NPSAS.

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As a result of combining the many data sources noted earlier, key NPSAS data elements include those listed on this slide, including student and institutional characteristics, detailed information on federal, institutional, and state support for a student's education, and enrollment histories.

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Using these data elements, analysts can evaluate a wide range of questions related to the student experience, like:

- How do students and families pay for postsecondary education?
- How have costs and financial aid packages changed over the years?
- Why do some students receive more financial aid than other students from apparently similar backgrounds?
- How much have students and families borrowed to pay for postsecondary education?
- How do aided and nonaided students compare on total resources available for education and other expenses? and
- What are the family characteristics of aided and non-aided students?

As mentioned earlier, NPSAS serves as the base year data collection for two NCES longitudinal studies. The first of these, the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, is discussed next. You can access the BPS introduction slides by advancing to the next slide. To return to the list of postsecondary education sample survey datasets to make another selection, click the “Return to List” button. To exit the module completely, click the “Exit” button.

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The Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) Longitudinal Study, implemented in 1990, follows the experience of first-time beginning college students – or FTBs – for a period of six years. Because it includes entering students irrespective of age, it complements the NCES longitudinal studies of high school cohorts and gives a broader picture of outcomes associated with postsecondary attendance. BPS draws its cohorts from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), which regularly collects financial aid and other data on nationally representative cross-sectional samples of postsecondary students. NPSAS provides the base-year data for FTBs; BPS then follows these students through school and into the workforce through interviews three and six years after college entry for most BPS studies.

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BPS collects data for research on two broad classes of questions, including student persistence in postsecondary education and early labor market outcomes for students who begin and/or complete certificate and associates degree programs. Given its connection to NPSAS, many use the BPS data to explore the relationship between these two research domains and student and family financing of postsecondary education.

BPS is also used to generate two nationally-representative indicators of student progress: the proportion of students who complete a certificate or degree program within six years, both at their first institution as well as at any school, college, or university.

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To date, there have been four BPS cohorts. The most recent completed study followed a first-time beginning cohort from 2003-04, interviewing them at the end of their first year (2004), the end of their third year (2006), and the end of their sixth year (2009). Because alternating administrations of NPSAS begin either a BPS or a Baccalaureate and Beyond cohort, the next BPS cohort was begun with first-time beginning students in the 2011-2012 academic year. These students were reinterviewed in 2014 and a final reinterview is anticipated in 2017.

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The target population for BPS is first-time beginning students. That is, students who enroll in postsecondary education in a given academic year for the first time since completing their high school requirements, including the equivalent General Education Development (GED) test. Hence, BPS includes students who are not direct entrants to postsecondary education from high school. In addition, since the first BPS cohort, students who earn postsecondary credits prior to completing their high school requirements are eligible to participate in BPS.

In the most recent completed BPS study, BPS:04/09, the starting cohort consisted of 18,640 eligible sample members. The final BPS:04/09 cohort includes approximately 16,680 students, including 16,120 who responded to all three waves of student interviews.

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Here, we outline the primary data sources used to inform the BPS study by interview wave. As you can see, student interview, Department of Education, and National Student Clearinghouse data are incorporated in to the dataset at the end of students' first, third, and sixth years. Although federal aid data is available for each year of a student's enrollment, some data elements, such as students' institutional aid, are currently only gathered for student's first year. For the BPS cohort beginning in the 2011-2012 year, NCES will gather information on institutional aid for each year of enrollment, funding permitting. Other data, such as transcripts, are not collected until the end of the study at its sixth year.

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As a result of querying the data sources outlined on the prior slide, key BPS data elements are updated or expanded at each follow-up opportunity. Here, key data elements for students' first, third, and sixth years are highlighted.

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Using the data elements identified earlier, BPS can be used to address student persistence, progress, and attainment after entry into postsecondary education and, for students who enter the workforce, issues concerning their early labor market experiences. Its unique contribution is the inclusion of students who are not direct entrants to postsecondary education from high school, a steadily growing segment of the postsecondary student population. Their inclusion allows analysis of the differences, if any, between traditional (recent high school graduates) and nontraditional students in aspirations, progress, persistence, and attainment.

Congress and other policymakers use BPS data when they consider how new legislation will affect students in postsecondary education. BPS data can answer such questions as: What percentage of beginning students complete their degree programs? What are the financial, family, and school-related factors that prevent students from completing their programs, and what can be done to help them? Do students receiving financial aid do as well as those who do not? Additional questions that BPS can address include the following: Do students who are part-time or discontinuous attenders have the same educational goals as full-time, consistent attenders? And are they as likely to attain similar educational goals?

This concludes the introduction to the BPS study. The Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study is discussed next. You can access the B&B introduction slides by advancing to the next slide. To return to the list of postsecondary education sample survey datasets to make another selection, click the “Return to List” button. To exit the module completely, click the “Exit” button.

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The Baccalaureate and Beyond (or B&B) Longitudinal Study provides both cross-sectional profiles of the enrollment, persistence, and financial aid receipt of bachelor’s degree recipients in their final year of undergraduate education and longitudinal data on their entry into and progress through graduate-level education and the workforce. Special emphasis is placed on the career path of graduates considering and/or entering teaching.

As noted earlier, B&B draws the base-year data for its cohorts from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, or NPSAS. The most recent cohort was begun in 2007–08. This cohort was followed for the first time in 2009 (B&B:08/09). Eligible sample members were interviewed again in 2012, four years after graduation, and plans are to interview the cohort a final time in 2018, 10 years after receipt of their baccalaureate degree.

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With its base year administration as part of NPSAS and its three follow-ups, Baccalaureate and Beyond collects information on a wide range experiences, including those related to employment, post-baccalaureate education and training, work experiences, family formation and the life course, federal loan repayment and, as noted earlier, early pathways to and through the teaching profession.

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To date, three B&B cohorts have been fielded. The first followed 1992-93 bachelor's degree recipients for a period of ten years, to 2002-2003. The most recent cohort was begun with 2007-08 bachelor's degree recipients, with completed follow-ups one and four years post-graduation. A ten year follow-up is planned. Due to resource constraints, planned four-year and ten-year follow-ups for the 1999-2000 B&B cohort were not executed.

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As noted earlier, the target population for the B&B study is students who have graduated with a baccalaureate degree within a given year, regardless of when those students began their postsecondary education.

For the 2007-08 B&B cohort, this includes more than 15,000 students who graduated with a bachelors' degree between July 1, 2007, to June 30, 2008.

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B&B sample members are identified during the NPSAS student interview. They include students who institutions have identified as likely bachelor's degree recipients as well as students who may not have been institutionally-identified but indicate in their interview they will have completed their bachelor's degree by June 30th of the study year.

Because potential teachers are a focus of the B&B study, NCES increases the sampling rate of 4-year institutions that report relatively higher proportions of their graduating students as having earned a bachelor's degree in teaching and decrease rates among 4-year institutions that report relatively lower proportion of teaching graduates. Finally, to ensure coverage across a wide range of academic disciplines, NCES decreases the sampling rate of students who institutions indicate as earning a baccalaureate in business, which would otherwise predominate the sample due to its popularity nationwide.

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NCES combines data from the student interview, records of students' bachelor's degree granting institution, Department of Education Data systems, and other administrative records to create the B&B study data files. Most of these systems are queried in the base year data collection, capturing a complete picture of students' undergraduate

experience. Follow-ups combine data from student interviews with additional queries to the National Student Clearinghouse records to capture information about subsequent enrollment, and to Department of Education systems to learn about loan repayment and students' use of loans and grants to finance post-baccalaureate education, if applicable. Finally, NCES collects B&B students' bachelor's-degree transcripts, providing detailed information about coursetaking patterns and related academic outcomes.

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As a result of querying the data sources outlined on the prior slide, key B&B data elements are updated or expanded at each follow-up opportunity. Here, focal data elements for base year and the one-year, four-year, and 10-year follow-ups are detailed.

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As a result, analysts using B&B are able to address a wide range of research questions. They include questions not only about students' baccalaureate experiences, but also their experiences as they enter the labor market and make decisions about taking additional training and education after having earned their bachelor's degrees. As noted earlier, B&B also has a special focus on study members' entry in to the teaching profession, if applicable, whether or not they completed training to become a teacher during their undergraduate education.

This concludes the introduction to the B&B study. Information about how to access postsecondary sample survey data is discussed next. You can access the slides about accessing postsecondary data by advancing to the next slide. To return to the list of postsecondary education sample survey datasets to make another selection, click the "Return to List" button. To exit the module completely, click the "Exit" button.

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There are three ways to access postsecondary sample survey data. The first two can be found through the NCES DataLab and are public-use data tools called QuickStats and PowerStats. QuickStats allows users to generate simple tables with one variable of interest as the table rows, and another variable of interest as the columns. PowerStats allows users to generate more complex tables with multiple variables of interest in both the rows and columns. It should be noted that there are no public-use micro-level data files for postsecondary sample survey data. The third way to access these data is through a Restricted-use license for the micro-level data files of interest. The instructions for acquiring a license are documented on the NCES website, as well as within the DLDT Common Module "Acquiring Micro-level NCES Data." The NCES DataLab, Restricted-use license instructions, and DLDT module can all be accessed by clicking on the corresponding underlined screen text.

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This module has provided you with an overview of the NCES postsecondary education datasets. It has introduced you to the target populations; sample and study designs; data collection years, data sources, and; and highlights of the topics for which data are available for analysis for NPSAS, BPS, and B&B.

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In addition it has provided resources that can be accessed through the DLDT system and/or on the NCES website.

You may now proceed to the next module in the series, or click the exit button to return to the landing page.